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Annual Report

OF THE

Medical Officer of Health

FOR

No. 2 SANITARY AREA

DEVON

1942

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ANNUAL REPORT

for No. 2 Sanitary Area for 1942

comprising:—

AXMINSTER URBAN, AXMINSTER RURAL, HONITON BOROUGH, HONITON RURAL, AND SEATON URBAN.

DR. D. STEELE-PERKINS, *Med. Officer of Health.*

To the Chairman and Councillors for the
District comprising No. 2 Sanitary Area,

By direction of the Ministry of Health, my Annual Report for 1942 will again be only an Interim Report. This step is taken owing to the War, in order to conserve paper, and also the great expense entailed in the production of a separate report for each District.

Only very essential matters will be referred to, and any urgent Sanitary matters that had to be dealt with during the year. I have also excluded from my report, by direction of the Ministry, the population of each Area, and also the number of Houses. These figures I shall be pleased to give at any meeting of my Councils.

During the past year, the number of Evacuees in the District has steadily decreased, owing to the gradual return of these children to their homes. This is very unfortunate, as one noted with great satisfaction the enormous improvement in the health and physique of these children, during their temporary residence in the country. Amongst the Evacuees there has been very little serious illness, and a very large majority of the cases treated at the Sick Bay have been cases of skin infection, such as Impetigo and Eczema.

Diphtheria cases in the whole of the Area amounted to 10 cases, this is an increase on 1941 of 2 cases, but the increase was entirely due to a whole family of 3 non-immunised children in the Honiton Rural District contracting the Disease. The cases of Diphtheria occurred: Honiton Rural 5, Axminster Rural 2, Honiton Borough 3, Axminster Urban 0, Seaton 0. I would here again stress the importance and value of Immunisation against Diphtheria. In the 10 cases quoted above, they all occurred in un-immunised children, and a fact worthy of notice, that children who had been immunised and living in the same house where cases occurred, escaped the Disease.

Included in the cases of Diphtheria are two cases, both very unique and exceedingly rare: they were two cases occurring in infants under one month old.

One case occurred at the Guardians Institution, in a child a few days old. This child had never left the lying-in ward of the Hospital, it was an exceptionally virulent form of Diphtheria, and the child died when it was only 13 days old. I took swabs of every single person who had been in contact with the mother and child, including numerous ones of the mother herself, but could never trace the origin of it.

The other case occurred at Colestocks in a child 6 days old. This child was infected by a sister in the house, who had the disease; fortunately in this case, the child's life was saved.

These two cases are unique in my records of over 30 years as Medical Officer of Health: I have never seen a case before in a child so young, and one had always been under the impression that a child up to 10 months to a year, was practically immune.

These two cases were fully reported to the Ministry of Health, to whom I am deeply indebted for very valuable information as to the liability of Diphtheria amongst children so young, and although it is exceptionally rare for an infant of this age to contract the Disease, we must bear in mind that Immunity is merely a

relative term, and no human being is a perfect being, and therefore there is a possibility, but a very rare one, of infants under a year old contracting the Disease, and to bring it more forcibly home to me, I had as I have reported, two cases in infants under a month old contracting the disease, and they are the first cases I have seen in my 30 years as Medical Officer of Health.

Scarlet Fever.—During the year 16 cases of Scarlet Fever were reported, all of a very mild type, they occurred—Axminster Rural 6; Axminster Urban 4; Honiton Rural 2; Honiton Borough 1; Seaton Urban 3.

Most of the cases were removed to Whipton Isolation Hospital, and at no time was a serious epidemic threatened, as the cases were all sporadic and spread over the whole year.

Puerpural Pyrexia.—Five cases occurred during the year as against 7 in 1941—Axminster Rural 1; Honiton Rural 1; Honiton Borough 1; Seaton Urban 2.

This is an exceptionally good record, and speaks very highly of the care and skilled Nursing of the District Nurses.

Scabies.—I am glad to say cases of Scabies are rapidly disappearing from our Area, a few chronic cases keep cropping up, but on the whole, I am glad to say, we have very nearly cleared it out of our Area.

Bed Wetters.—These like Scabies are gradually disappearing and very few cases have been admitted to Burwood ; once they get to Burwood they are soon taught better manners, and we have very few recurrent cases.

Burwood Sick Bay.—Again I have to report the very excellent work this Sick Bay has done, under the very capable administration of the Matron, Mrs. K. Drysdale Anderson. We have had the usual shortage of Nurses during the past year, and at times it has been very difficult to carry on, but we are very fortunate in having a Matron who never knows when she is beaten, and will turn

her hand to anything, and I would again like to emphasize that the success of the Burwood Sick Bay is entirely due to the hard work, and interest, the Matron takes in making Burwood a success.

The number of cases admitted to Burwood during the year was 204, as compared with 133 in 1941.

A certain number of Devon children have been admitted under a Ministry of Health Order, and there is a possibility, that in the future, Land Girls will be admitted for treatment : an order for this has been issued by the Ministry, but up to the present, no admissions have been applied for.

Minor Fever Hospital.—This Hospital at Monkton, for which I had found it impossible to staff, has now been closed down, by the order of the Ministry. If a staff could have been found, it might have done very useful work.

Water Supplies.—Heavy demands have been made on all our water supplies, and there has been no serious shortage of water throughout the District. Honiton Borough has obtained its new supply and should never be short of water again ; the same applies to Axminster Urban, who with the additional supply from the Rural District, should now be in a position to face any serious drought.

In Axminster Rural and Honiton Rural we shall after the War have to thoroughly go into the question of water supplies for a large number of villages, whose shallow wells are open to pollution. Kilmington is one village where wells are always being reported as bad, and although the records of the health of this village are excellent, yet we cannot allow the existing pollution of wells to continue ; had it not been for the War, Kilmington would have by now been enjoying a good piped supply.

The water supply at Beer is now satisfactory, and the water is chlorinated.

War Time Health of No. 2 *Area.*—It is very difficult to gauge the number of cases of Measles and Whooping Cough occurring in

one's Area, as a large number of these cases are never seen by a Doctor, and so are never notified, but as there has not been a single death registered from these two diseases, I think we can safely assume that the epidemics have not been of a very virulent nature.

As a matter of fact, the general health of my Area has, in my opinion been excellent, and considerably above the standard of pre-war : I think this is in the main due to the standard of living set for us all. We have sufficient to eat, all of high quality, sustaining and nourishing, and I have noted on my frequent visits to the various schools in my Area, the exceptionally healthy appearance of all the children, I have not seen a single case of under nourishment. I think a lot can be said for the rationing of sweets; in the past children were apt to spend all their pennies on sweets of very poor quality, now they are limited to their coupons, and practically only sweets of good quality can be purchased.

My report on Immunisation will be dealt with separately under each District.

I would also like to thank my Sanitary Inspectors for their very great kindness and co-operation with me during the past year. Their work has been splendid, and although grossly understaffed, have done a real job of work, and I am very grateful to them.

I now append a short report on each District, taking them in alphabetical order.

AXMINSTER URBAN.

Area	1,300 acres
Population	
No. of Inhabited Houses	
Rateable Value	£18,780
Penny Rate produces	£78 12s. 6d.

Infectious Disease.

The following cases of Infectious Disease were notified in 1942:—

	1941	1942
Measles	105 cases	0 cases
Diphtheria	1 „	0 „
Whooping Cough	11 „	0 „
Scarlet Fever	3 „	4 „
Para Typhoid	1 „	0 „
Erysipelas	1 „	1 „
Pneumonia	8 „	5 „
Puerpural Pyrexia	2 „	0 „

Deaths.

Number of Deaths registered from all causes:—

1941—(20 Males, 8 Females)	28
1942—(21 Males, 19 Females)...	40

Live Births.

Number of Births registered:—

1941—(18 Males, 9 Females) and includes 2 illegitimate births	27
1942—(22 Males, 21 Females) and includes 2 illegitimate births	43

Still Births.

Number of above registered:—

1941—(1 Male and 1 Female, legitimate)	2
1942—(4 Males, legitimate)	4

Deaths of Infants under 1 year.

1941—No Deaths were registered.
1942—2 Deaths were registered.

The Water supplies of the Urban District have now been augmented by a supply from the Rural District, which can be used when and if required. This should ensure the Urban District of any shortage for many years to come.

During the year, I held Immunisation Clinics at Axminster. These were well attended, and a large number of pre school age children were immunised. This is most satisfactory, as I like to get hold of these children before they go to School, and so protect them. The number of children immunised at Axminster was 99, and I am glad to say, some of the few who had previously refused, brought along their children to be done.

As you will note with satisfaction on the opposite page, the amount of Infectious Disease notified in the Urban district is, I think, a record for any Urban District. The almost complete absence of Infectious Disease is, I think, unique, and one we may be well proud of.

I have, in order to compare 1941 with 1942, included my records for both years for comparison.

AXMINSTER RURAL DISTRICT.

Area	51,468 acres
Population	
No. of Inhabited Houses	
Rateable Value	£50,209
Penny Rate produces	£207 15s. 0d.
No. of Parishes	14

Infectious Disease.

The following cases of Infectious Disease were notified in 1942:—

	1941	1942
Measles	200 cases	0 cases
Pneumonia	10 „	12 „
Diphtheria	1 „	2 „
Whooping Cough	58 „	15 „
Scarlet Fever	4 „	6 „
Erysipelas	2 „	2 „
Typhoid	1 „	0 „
Puerpural Pyrexia	1 „	1 „

The cases of Scarlet Fever were all of a mild type, and were evenly distributed throughout the area during the year, and at no time was there an epidemic.

Deaths.

Number of Deaths registered from all causes:—

1941—(82 Males, 84 Females)	166
1942—(68 Males, 81 Females)	149

Live Births.

Number of Births registered:—

1941—(97 Males, 61 Females) 158

6 illegitimate Births were registered, and are included in the above total of 158.

1942—(81 Males, 79 Females) 160

7 illegitimate Births were registered, and are included in the above total of 160.

Still Births.

1941—3 Still Births were registered (all legitimate).
1942—7 Still Births were registered (all legitimate).

Deaths of Infants under 1 year.

1941—6 Deaths were registered (includes 2 illegitimate).
1942—5 Deaths were registered (includes 1 illegitimate).

Water and Sewerage.

BEER.—The Chlorination Plant for the Lower Supply, which was of doubtful purity, has been installed and is working satisfactorily.

COLYFORD.—This continues satisfactorily.

COLYTON.—The Hardening Plant has been installed and is working satisfactorily. A thorough overhaul of the whole of the scheme was carried out, and main leaks repaired, with the result that the Committee are now able to give a constant supply.

Infectious Disease.

The year 1942 has been a remarkable one, as regards absence of Infectious Disease : six cases of Scarlet Fever and two cases of Diphtheria are a splendid record. The Scarlet Fever were of a very milk type, while the two cases of Diphtheria were at Colyton and as usual occurred in unimmunised children, and the infection was brought by a soldier on leave.

Immunisation Clinics have again been held throughout the District and I think our Area is now very well protected, and I think the proof in this is the gradual decline, every year now, of cases of Diphtheria. The number of children immunised in the Axminster Rural District was 497. This I am glad to say included a large number of previous refusals, and also a large number of pre school age children.

HONITON RURAL DISTRICT.

Area	61,265 acres
Population	
No. of Parishes	22
No. of Inhabited Houses	
Rateable Value	£23,956
Penny Rate produces	£101 6s. 10d.

Infectious Disease.

The following cases of Infectious Disease were notified in 1942:—

	1941	1942
Scarlet Fever	6 cases	2 cases
Diphtheria	4 „	5 „
Whooping Cough	51 „	43 „
Measles	170 „	0 „
Pneumonia	1 „	1 „
Erysipelas	1 „	0 „
Puerpural Pyrexia	2 „	1 „

Deaths.

Number of Deaths registered from all causes:—

1941—(45 Males, 44 Females)	89
1942—(56 Males, 41 Females)	97

Live Births.

Number of Live Births registered:—

1941—(67 Males, 69 Females)	136
1942—(76 Males, 47 Females)	123

The number of illegitimate Births registered was 5 and are included in the above total of 123.

Still Births.

1941—Number of Still Births registered was 2 (both legitimate).
1942—Number of Still Births registered was 1 (legitimate).

Deaths of Infants under 1 year.

1941—The number registered was 6 (includes 2 illegitimate)
1942—The number registered was 10 (all legitimate).

Again I think we can be very satisfied with our record of Health conditions for 1942. With the exception of 5 cases of Diphtheria, three of which occurred in one house, in un-immunised children, we have had a wonderful record, in fact one of the best since I was appointed your Medical Officer of Health close on 30 years ago.

As usual I visited all Schools and carried out Immunisation Clinics and the response of parents was very good. In all, I immunised 380 children, and a large number were those who had previously refused.

During the year 1942 the work of the Public Health Department increased considerably and many difficulties were encountered owing to staff decreases. The work done consisted mainly of work under the Defence Regulations and facts and figures cannot be published.

It is general work of this department with regard to housing, etc., which has now practically come to a standstill owing to the difficulty of obtaining labour and materials, but I am looking forward to the time when considerable post war work will have to be carried out in order to maintain and extend the essential public health services.

Water Supplies.

Generally speaking, the water supplies have caused little trouble, with one or two exceptions, which will no doubt be remedied in due course.

Sewerage.

There are still only four Parishes which have sewers, and of these, two only are satisfactory. Considerable all round improvement is required and it is assumed that the water supplies and sewerage requirements in this District will need a complete review in the future.

Housing.

Several efforts have been made to have agricultural cottages repaired or reconditioned, but only in very few cases has the necessary labour and material been available. However, housing conditions in the District are fair, although new houses will be required post war in order to house the Rural Community, and in this respect it is only fair to state that the normal housing accommodation has decreased owing to town dwellers purchasing rural cottages for retirement, etc. It is also noticeable that these purchases appear to have caused an inflated value of these types of dwellings.

Refuse Collections, Etc.

The Council have now abandoned their normal refuse collections in favour of general organised salvage collections. The salvage activities have caused a considerable amount of work, but although financial difficulties were experienced, I am pleased to report the scheme is working satisfactory and so far has been self supporting.

Post War Reconstruction, Etc.

The reaction of the public with regard to post war reconstruction is very noticeable and I hope that the time will come when all the parishes in this District will be able to enjoy the amenities which are considered essential in the towns, etc.

HONITON BOROUGH.

Area	3,134 acres
No. of Inhabited Houses	
Population	
Rateable Value	£24,987
Penny Rate produces	£102 5s. 7d.

Deaths.

Number of Deaths registered from all causes:—

1941—(24 Males, 23 Females)	47
1942—(27 Males, 17 Females)	44

Live Births.

Number of Live Births registered:—

1941—(38 Males, 22 Females) 60

4 Illegitimate Births were registered, and are included in the above total of 60.

1942—(24 Males, 23 Females) 47

2 Illegitimate Births were registered, and are included in the above total of 47.

Still Births.

1941—1 was registered. 1942—1 was registered (legitimate).

Deaths of Infants under 1 year.

1941—1 Death was registered (legitimate).

1942—4 Deaths were registered (legitimate).

Infectious Disease.

The following cases of Infectious Disease were notified in 1942:—

	1941	1942
Scarlet Fever	2 cases	1 case
Diphtheria	1 „	3 „
Whooping Cough	16 „	5 „
Measles	22 „	2 „
Erysipelas	1 „	0 „
Pneumonia	1 „	0 „
Puerpural Pyrexia	2 „	1 „

The health of the Borough has been very good indeed : there were three cases of Diphtheria, one case an infant at the Guardians Infirmary I have previously reported on, the other two cases were one in an adult and did not come under the immunisation scheme. The other a child who had not been immunised.

Water supplies in the Borough, thanks to the new Widworthy supply are now extremely satisfactory, and we should never be short of water again.

The Sewerage works continue to function very satisfactorily, and with the enlargement of the disposal ground, there should be no more complaints of pollution of the River Otter.

Immunisation Clinics have been held in the Borough, and the number of children immunised was 137. This is extremely satisfactory, and we now have a very large percentage of our children immunised.

SEATON URBAN DISTRICT COUNCIL.

Area	1190.43 acres
Population	
No. of Inhabited Houses	
Rateable Value	£31,200
Penny Rate produces	£120

Deaths.

Number of Deaths registered from all causes:—

1941—(24 Males, 26 Females)	50
1942—(19 Males, 47 Females)	66

Live Births.

Number of Live Births registered:—

1941—(24 Males, 16 Females)	40
1942—(19 Males, 13 Females) all legitimate ...	32

Still Births.

1941—2 were registered (legitimate).

1942—5 were registered (legitimate).

Deaths of Infants under 1 year.

1941—None registered.

1942—1 death.

Infectious Disease.

The following cases of Infectious Disease were notified in 1942:—

	1941	1942
Scarlet Fever	7 cases	3 cases
Puerpural Pyrexia ...	0 „	2 „
Whooping Cough	28 „	27 „
Measles	68 „	3 „
Pneumonia	7 „	1 „
Erysipelas	1 „	1 „
Diphtheria	0 „	0 „

Again I have great pleasure in reporting Seaton's splendid record of absence of Infectious Disease. Only three cases of Scarlet Fever were reported, and for the second year in succession, an entire absence of Diphtheria, a truly wonderful record : every year seems to get better and better.

Seaside resorts always run more risk of importing Infectious Disease owing to the influx of visitors than inland towns.

The Scarlet Fever was of a very mild type.

I have received no complaints as to water shortage, but on the other hand, I am continually receiving requests for housing accommodation, and I am afraid Seaton will have to face a big housing scheme after the War, in fact in none of my Districts is the demand for houses so great as in the Seaton Area.

During the year I carried out my Immunisation Clinics, and I had a very good response : in all I immunised 106 children, a very satisfactory result. Seaton now have a very highly immunised population.

Your obedient servant,

DUNCOMBE STEELE-PERKINS,

Medical Officer of Health.